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ABSTRACT

The extent to which pupils at the primary level view Sesame Street and The Electric Company television programs and their impact on learning were studied. Questionnaires were directed to parents of children in eight kindergartens and to principals of the 34 elementary schools in Vancouver. At their homes, 95% of the kindergarten pupils had watched Sesame Street at some time, and approximately two-thirds watched the program regularly. At the elementary schools, Sesame Street was being viewed during school time to some extent by 2,000 pupils, and The Electric Company program had been seen by 300 pupils in eight schools; there were virtually no pre- or post-viewing activities. In each of the eight kindergarten classes, 11 performance tasks were administered to five pupils who watched Sesame Street regularly at home and to five who watched it irregularly or not at all. The Coordinator and Consultants in Primary Education visited 20 or more classes viewing Sesame Street, and held discussions with teachers of these classes and with teachers of classes who had watched Sesame Street but had subsequently discontinued watching. A comparison of scores on the performance tests revealed that regular viewers of Sesame Street had superior knowledge and understanding of letters, words, numerals, quantities and shapes. Furthermore, their teachers claimed that the regular viewers had derived other important benefits, such as observational skills, more awareness of their surroundings, broader interest, greater sensitivity and consideration for others. (DB)

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RESEARCH REPORT

The Impact of "Sesame Street" on Primary Pupils in Vancouver

July, 1972.

E. N. Ellis
Marilyn J. Reid
Robert Hoen

Research Report 72-16

Department of Planning and Evaluation
Board of School Trustees
1595 West 10th Avenue
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THE IMPACT OF "SESAME STREET" ON PRIMARY PUPILS IN VANCOUVER

Abstract

This study was undertaken at the request of School Trustees to determine the extent to which pupils at the primary level view Sesame Street and The Electric Company television programs and to assess their impact on learning.

A questionnaire directed to parents of pupils in eight representative kindergartens revealed that:

- almost every home has a television receiver,
- 95% of the kindergarten pupils had at some time watched Sesame Street, and
- approximately two-thirds of them watched the program regularly.

The responses of Principals to a questionnaire indicated that:

- Sesame Street was being viewed during school time to some extent by 2,000 pupils in 34 schools,
- The Electric Company program had been seen by 300 pupils in eight schools, and
- There were virtually no pre-viewing or post-viewing activities.

A comparison of scores on a performance test revealed that regular viewers of Sesame Street in comparison with the infrequent viewers among their classmates have a superior knowledge and understanding of letters, words, numerals, quantities and shapes. Furthermore, their teachers claimed that the regular viewers had derived other important benefits, such as observational skills, more awareness of their surroundings, broader interests, greater sensitivity and consideration for others.

The Coordinator and Consultants in Primary Education recorded their observations of classes viewing Sesame Street as well as their conversations with the teachers. They listed reasons why kindergarten pupils do not watch the program regularly or for more than a few months of time.

Parents considered that Sesame Street was an excellent program for their pre-school children and that it served to prepare them for school.

The study clearly indicates that Sesame Street is having a significant impact on the development of primary pupils in Vancouver. It would seem advisable then to consider not only how the educational benefits of this program can be maximized; but also how, in general, the tremendous potential of television may be fully realized in our schools.

THE IMPACT OF "SESAME STREET" ON PRIMARY PUPILS IN VANCOUVER

A. Introduction

Sesame Street is an educational television program produced by the Children's Television Workshop (CTW), New York. It is designed to help children get started on learning before entering school. The program is entertaining and fun, as well as being "chock full of" all sorts of new and interesting ideas and experiences for children. The program also teaches children specific skills, basic understandings, and desirable attitudes. The goals of Sesame Street are listed in Appendix A.

The Electric Company is a similar program designed for school beginners who are learning to read. It aims to develop verbal abilities, i. e., knowledge of the alphabet, phonetics and word-attack skills.

Sesame Street is seen in Vancouver on Channel 2 at 11 a. m. daily, Monday through Friday. During the summer season, it also appears on Channel 9 at 4 p. m. each weekday.

The Electric Company program is seen on Channel 9 at 10 a. m. each schoolday and at 5:30 each weekday during the summer season.

The Audio-Visual department of the Vancouver School Board makes video-tape recordings of both of these programs. These tapes are available to the schools on a loan basis.

School Trustees in Vancouver have asked for a study of the impact of these programs on the performance of pupils at the primary level.

B. Outline of the Study

1. The literature relating to these programs has been reviewed (see Section C). It would appear that in its development Sesame Street has been thoroughly researched. The Educational Testing Service has made two comprehensive evaluations of Sesame Street and the findings have been generally favourable.

2. A questionnaire (see Appendix B) was sent during the last week of January, 1972, to the principals of all elementary schools in Vancouver to determine the extent to which these educational television programs are being viewed in school time. A summary of the responses to this questionnaire appears in Section D of this report.

3. In order to determine the extent to which Sesame Street is viewed at home, a questionnaire (see Appendix C) was sent in late January, 1972 to parents of children enrolled in one afternoon kindergarten class in

each of eight representative[1] schools. A summary of the responses to this questionnaire appears in Section E.

4. In each of the eight selected kindergarten classes the teacher administered during the month of February, 1972 some performance tasks to ten of her pupils, selected by the writers on the basis of information provided on the parent questionnaires. Five of these subjects were ones who watched Sesame Street most regularly at home. The other five pupils viewed the program irregularly or not at all. Each teacher was given materials and instructions for administering the tests as well as a form for recording purposes, (see Appendix D). A summary of the results on these performance tests is presented in Section F and excerpts from the observations of teachers in Appendix E.

5. The Coordinator and Consultants in Primary Education visited the classes, recorded their observations and reported on the reactions of teachers. A summary of these comments appears in Section G and an edited transcription of recorded comments appears in Appendix F.

6. A research intern interviewed selected parents to supplement their responses to the questionnaire. Their comments are summarized in Section H.

C. A Review of the literature

1. Development of the Program. Sesame Street was established as a result of a study by Joan Ganz Cooney for the Carnegie Corporation in 1967, which showed that 97% of American homes (90% of those with low income) had TV sets; that TV was the one continuous source of knowledge about the world for disadvantaged children; and that by age four at least half of a child's potential growth in intelligence may have occurred.

   The original objective of the program was "to apply the production techniques and entertainment values of popular commercial television to an instructional program for pre-school children that emphasized the needs of the urban and rural disadvantaged child." (Connell and Palmer, 14-15)

[1]These schools were randomly selected, one from each of the eight districts of the city. In those schools having more than one afternoon kindergarten, the selection of the class was made on a chance basis. It should be noted that only afternoon kindergartens were considered for the reason that these pupils would not have any opportunity to see Sesame Street in school time.

The combining of efforts of TV production and educational research specialists was a primary aim of the experiment. One hundred advisors from a variety of fields cooperated to produce a set of curriculum goals (see Appendix A). Educational Testing Service was retained for independent evaluation of outcomes. Writer's workbooks were prepared for each goal. Pre-school children in inner-cities were tested. Attentiveness to various types of presentation was researched. Trial programs were evaluated. In November, 1969, the first regular showing of the program occurred. Continuing evaluation and development was a commitment of the producers.

Robert Filep, of the Institute for Educational Development in Los Angeles, has led the development of parent involvement in the program's use in the home. (Graham)

The process by which Sesame Street was developed has recently been studied in detail by Kratochvil and others at American Institutes for Research, under a contract with the U. S. Office of Education.

2. Evaluation of the Program

(a) Independent Research

(1) The ETS evaluation of the program's effects after its first year of broadcasting was published in October, 1970.

The over-all impact of the program was described as follows: "Children who viewed Sesame Street achieved many of the stated goals in letters, numbers, and forms, and they gained appreciably in their skill in sorting and classifying. Transfer of learning was noted in some instances but basically the large gains occurred in those areas that were directly taught. There was no evidence of side effects..." (Ball and Bogatz, 366)

Ages three through five all benefited, the younger more so than the older. Transfer and indirect learning occurred more in the older children within that age bracket. In specific knowledge and skills taught directly, three-year-olds who viewed regularly had higher achievement than five-year-olds who did not view regularly. No significant differences were found related to sex.

It was found that children with lower prior achievement gained more. Those with higher prior achievement gained best from moderate rather than total viewing (the gains added by greater-than-moderate viewing were small).

Findings related to socio-economic status were similar to those regarding prior achievement. Particularly noteworthy was the finding that low SES children who viewed regularly surpassed high SES children who did not view the program at all.

Among those who viewed at home (as opposed to viewing in pre-school), the results were very positive. In some goal areas, disadvantaged home-viewers gained more than children in the same communities who attended pre-school. Among those who viewed in pre-school, gains were related to viewing, although the rate of gain leveled off between moderate and high-frequency viewing (moderate viewing gave best results for unit of time spent). Teachers' opinions were generally positive.

The results were especially positive among Spanish-speaking children (the one non-English group studied). This finding suggested the potential value of such programs for all children for whom English is not the first language.

(2) A summary of the major findings in the E. T. S. evaluation of the second year of Sesame Street was published in November, 1971.

The second-year evaluation supported the basic findings of the first-year evaluation In addition, the second-year evaluation found that:

- Teachers perceived that those pupils who had viewed Sesame Street frequently during the previous year were better prepared for school than the infrequent viewers; and teachers did not perceive the frequent viewers of the fast-paced program to be "turned off" by conventional classroom instruction.

- The first-year viewers who watched at home during the second year gained in most of the new, more complex goal areas added in the second year; those who were new viewers in the second year did not achieve the more complex goals but did gain in the original goal areas.

- Encouragement of children's viewing by community people, was an important factor affecting the gains among viewers.

- There were gains in favourable attitudes toward school and toward people of other races among at-home viewers.

(The periodical Report on Education Research criticized the second-year E. T. S. evaluation for side-stepping the issue of whether advantaged children gained as much as disadvantaged children, thus leaving the gap between the two groups undiminished.)

(3) A study by R. B. Trout of the effects of Sesame Street on new kindergarten children was carried out in the suburban school district of Park Ridge, Illinois. The connection between the Sesame program and the performance of the children was only inferred, not proven, but the findings are worth reporting. It was found that 95% of the new registrants in kindergarten watched Sesame Street. Interviews with over 700 of these children revealed that unusually high percentages of them could: name all or nearly all capital letters (51%) and lower case letters (30%), print (not copy) letters named (37%), name numerals 0 through 9 (73%), and associate quantity with numerals (74%). There was no significant difference between sexes in either achievement or viewing. Implications of the findings were that the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children is not narrowing as a result of the Sesame Street program, and that the school programs for the first year or more would need change.

(b) Criticism

According to O'Bryan (Dept. of Applied Psychology, O. I. S. E.), criticism of Sesame Street tends to come from those who emphasize freedom and structure-less experiences fitted to the individual child--psychologists and educators whose basic approaches to their fields differ from those of the program. He has identified the following criticisms:

1. that mechanical memory training is stressed and generalizable concept development ignored,
2. that rapid-fire, fragmented patterning of material avoids teaching concentration skills,
3. that there is a lack of viewer activity, a passiveness which is not consistent with good learning principles,
4. that the program is too tightly structured,
5. that feelings of actors in the program are not played with sufficient emotion,
6. that poor parent-child relationships can result if the parent has unreasonable expectations for the program,
7. that the program's approach is too much like commercial advertising.

The British Broadcasting Corporation's director of children's programs, Monica Sims, recently refused to air Sesame Street on the grounds that it "indoctrinates" and has "authoritarian aims". (Newsweek, Sept. 20, 1971) As Sims sees the program, "Right answers are demanded and praised... Our job is not only to teach a set of facts but to stimulate

children's activity and enthusiasm to learn and do things for themselves". She claims the program is characterized by middle-class attitudes and lack of reality. The London Sunday Times, however, disagreed, calling the BBC's "Play School" program "genteel, middle-class pap compared with the vigor of the American show".

Dr. Herbert Sprigle, director of Learning to Learn School, Inc., in Jacksonville, Florida, and a researcher into the learning needs and styles of disadvantaged children, criticizes "Sesame Street" on the grounds that "passive, effortless learning" isn't retained as well as that which is "physically and mentally involved". (Grade Teacher, March 1971, p. 20). Sprigle has also found, through a study of 48 children in Florida, that disadvantaged children don't learn more from Sesame Street than from traditional pre-schooling. (It should be noted that no one has ever claimed such an accomplishment for the program.)

Samuel Kliger, a consultant on childhood education, questions whether Sesame Street's producers understand the language-learning process, since generalization inside the child does not come about by imitation of outside stimuli. He feels that the delightfulness of the program obscures the lack of good language-learning experiences.

Richard Ratliff, an Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Colorado, argues that Sesame Street teaches aggression. He cites examples of program sequences which he interprets to be models of aggression, some obvious and some subtle; and he reasons, on the basis of research findings in various studies, that children viewing the program learn aggression by imitation, particularly disadvantaged children who have lower self-esteem.

(c) Supportive Opinion

As O'Bryan points out, the producers see positive value in the program's emphasis on exact repetition and repetition with variation; it is thought to generate participation and anticipation, as well as memorization. The "fragmented" patterning of the presentation is based on formative research concerning attentiveness. The participation of the viewer is thought to occur through identification with selected characters in the program. Humour and incongruity, which are heavily relied on, are presumed to entertain, hold attention, motivate, provoke curiosity and expectation, and imbue language learning with pleasure and social qualities. The variation aspect of repetition and the emphasis on associational enlargement are thought to counter the criticism that generalizable concept development is ignored.

The reply of Joan Cooney, the creator of Sesame Street to the rejection of the program by the BBC, was: "Sims and colleagues are still caught up in the old-fashioned permissive nursery-school complex. In a society where home life is often too relaxed, serious educators must be interested in structured education" (Newsweek, Sept. 20, 1971).

Nicholas Johnson, writing in the National Elementary Principal, expressed the opinion that Sesame Street is a needed antidote to commercial TV, which he feels teaches violence, pill-escapism, and materialism. He thinks Sesame Street encourages attitudes of friendliness, self-esteem, sense of belonging, and fairness; teaches intellectual, manual and nutritional skills; and uses music, rhythm, and humour effectively. Johnson proposes that more programs like Sesame be created for other age groups.

D. Summary of Responses to the Questionnaire for Principals

A questionnaire (see Appendix B) was sent during the last week of January, 1972, to the principals of all elementary schools in Vancouver to obtain information about the nature and extent of the in-school viewing of these programs. Returns were received from 67 principals (93% return). In addition, there were eleven separate returns from primary annexes and one from the Reading Centre. The total number of completed questionnaires was 79.

The Sesame Street program is viewed to some extent in 34 schools (43%). The grades or levels viewing are approximately as follows:

Kindergartens	in 14 schools.
Year 1	in 19 schools.
Year 2	in 10 schools.
Year 3	in 5 schools.
Special Classes	in 5 schools.

Most of those who view the program, watch it only once or twice per week, or less frequently. Only five groups watch the program every school day, and only five other groups view it as many as three or four times per week.

The total number of children who view the program to some extent in school-time is approximately 2,000. The typical viewing group is a class, although several schools show the program to two or three classes together.

Almost no pre-viewing activities are done. Post-viewing activities are done in a few groups; the most common post-viewing activities are a review of the program materials and discussion.

The Electric Company program has only been viewed in eight schools, and four of them have used it only irregularly. Two groups view the program 3-5 times per week. The average level of viewing is Grade 3.

A total of about 300 children have seen the program in school. The size of viewing groups has ranged from 14 to 90. Virtually no pre- or post-viewing activities have been used.

Several respondents remarked that the lack of cablevision prevents them from using the program regularly. They have to borrow a video-tape recorder and video-tapes, and tend to show several Electric Company programs in a cluster.

Only six (9%) of the schools have their own video-tape recorders. It is interesting to note that none of these schools has reported using the Electric Company tapes.

E. Summary of Responses to the Questionnaire to Parents

In order to obtain information about the nature and extent of at-home viewing of Sesame Street, a questionnaire (see Appendix C) was directed during January, 1972, to parents of children enrolled in one afternoon kindergarten class in each of eight representative schools (see footnote p. 2). There were returns from all of the schools. Of 203 questionnaires distributed, there were 173 (85%) completed and returned.

A summary of the responses to these questionnaires follows:

1. Has your child watched Sesame Street?

Response	Frequency of Response	Percentage
"yes"	165	95%
"no"	8	5%

It would seem that nearly all of the kindergarten children have had some exposure to Sesame Street.

2. In general, what has been your child's pattern of watching Sesame Street?

		Frequency of Viewing Per Week						
School Year	Child's Age	0	1	2	3	4	5	No Response
1969-70	3	17	3	11	25	9	39	69
1970-71	4	6	4	10	16	28	69	40
1971-72	5	11	5	17	22	26	66	26

The number of "no responses" was high for this question. It was apparent from their comments that some parents who made no response meant "0".

Of all the returns, 73 children (42%) watched Sesame Street three to five times a week during the 1969-70 school year, (the first year that the program was on television). During the following school year (1970-71), many more of these children watched Sesame Street regularly. At that time, 113 children (65%) watched the program three to five times a week. Viewing frequency was reported

to be similar in the current school year, 1971-72, with 114 children (66%) watching Sesame Street from three to five times a week. (A few parents commented mistakenly that during the current school year their child is unable to watch Sesame Street because he is away at Kindergarten.) From these returns, it would appear that the interest in viewing Sesame Street is persisting.

3. Please indicate whether the child watched the program regularly on a colour set or on a black-and-white set.

Kind of Television	Frequency of Response	Percentage
Colour	38	23%
Black-and-White	125	77%
No response	10	-

Of parents who responded to this question, more than three-quarters of them have children who watched the program on a black-and-white television set.

4. How many letters of the alphabet does your child know?

Number of Letters	0	1-5	6-15	16-25	26	No Response
Frequency of Response	5	13	21	26	102	6
Percentage of the Total Response	3%	8%	13%	16%	61%	

According to the parents who answered this question, the majority of the children (102 or 61%) know all 26 letters of the alphabet. Only five (3 %) admitted that their children didn't know any of the letters of the alphabet.

5. How many numbers does your child know?

Number of Numbers	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	No Response
Frequency of Response	2	2	1	4	161	3
Percentage of Total Response	1%	1%	<1%	2%	95%	

It would seem that nearly all of these children (161 or 95%) know nine or ten numbers. Many parents commented that their children know more than ten numbers.

6. Can your child read?

(If yes, please list some of the words and one of the books from which he has been reading.)

Response	Frequency of Response	Percentage
"yes"	22	13%
"no"	150	87%
No response	1	-

Most of these children (150 or 87%), according to their parents, cannot read. It would seem that of those children who can read, many can read just a few specific words. However, a few parents who said that their children couldn't read offered similar lists of words but did not regard this as reading. Some parents mentioned that their children were able to read one or more "Dr. Seuss" books.

7. How often per week did you watch the program with your child?

Number of Times Per Week	0	1	2	3	4	5	No Response
Frequency of Response	47	31	41	24	6	13	11
Percentage of Total Response	29%	19%	25%	15%	4%	8%	

A majority of the parents who responded to this question (96 or 59%) watched the program with their child one to three times a week. A few (19 or 12%) said they watched four or five times a week. A significant proportion (47 or 29%) did not watch the program at all with their children.

8. How often per week did you follow up the program through talk or other activity with your child?

Number of Times Per Week	0	1	2	3	4	5	No Response
Frequency of Response	60	24	34	19	7	14	15
Percentage of Total Response	38%	15%	22%	12%	4%	9%	

Nearly half of the parents who responded to this question (77 or 49%) said that they followed up the program through talk or other activity with their children one to three times a week. Another large group of parents (60 or 38%) did not follow up the program (at least not enough to record on a weekly basis). A smaller number of parents (21 or 13%) follow up the program through activities with their children four or five times a week. Several parents commented that the program frequently initiated topics which the child wished to pursue further in discussion with his parents.

Three of the schools asked as an initial question, "Do you have a television set in your home?" It is noteworthy that 63 of the 64 parents responded, "Yes".

F. The Follow-Up by Kindergarten Teachers

The teacher of each of the eight selected kindergarten classes administered during February, 1972 eleven performance tasks (see Appendix D) to ten of her pupils; five were regular viewers of Sesame Street and the other five were reported by their parents to watch the program quite irregularly or not at all.

A comparison of the scores of the two groups (i. e. high-frequency viewers and low-frequency viewers) on the eleven performance tasks appears in Table I that follows.

TABLE I: A COMPARISON OF THE MEAN SCORES AND NUMBERS OF PERFECT SCORES FOR HIGH-FREQUENCY VIEWERS AND LOW-FREQUENCY VIEWERS ON ELEVEN PERFORMANCE TASKS

	High-Frequency Viewers (N=40[2])		Low-Frequency Viewers (N=40[2])		Significance Level of the difference between the Means[1]
	Mean	No. Perfect	Mean	No. Perfect	
1. Knowledge of Capital Letters	23.3	21	16.6	12	.005 level
2. Knowledge of Small Letters	18.7	14	11.5	8	.025 level
3. Words beginning with Specified Letters	2.98	15	2.18	8	n. s. d.
4. Printing of Letters	4.10	20	3.25	10	n. s. d.
5. Naming of Numerals	9.25	27	7.70	19	.05 level
6. Association of Quantity with Numerals[2]	2.84	22	2.52	19	n. s. d.
7. Can Name Square		38		34	n. s. d.
8. Can Name Circle		39		35	n. s. d.
9. Can Name Rectangle		35		23	.01 level
10. Can Name Triangle		36		29	n. s. d.
11. Names Round and Rectangular Objects		33		25	n. s. d.

[1] The Chi Square statistic was calculated to assess the significance of the difference between the means.

[2] N=40 except for item 6 for which N=25.

High-frequency viewers surpassed the low-frequency viewers on all eleven items, and, for four of these, the differences between the mean scores of the two groups were statistically significant. It is clear that the children who had viewed Sesame Street regularly in comparison with others who had not were superior in their knowledge and understanding of letters, words, numerals, quantities and shapes.

The teachers of these eight classes were asked if their pupils had derived other benefits from the viewing of Sesame Street. They noted various indications that high-frequency viewers had acquired a superior understanding of their physical and social environment: greater awareness of the environment, urban and rural, increased interest in many things, more love of animals, greater understanding and consideration of others, etc. (Typical notes from five teachers appear in Appendix E.) The features of the program that children liked best were the humour, the marionettes, and the characters, Big Bird, Oscar the Grouch and The Cookie Monster.

G. A Summary of the Comments from Primary Specialists

The Coordinator and Consultants in Primary Education visited the classes, recorded their observations and reported on the reactions of teachers. (An edited transcription of recorded comments appears in Appendix F.)

The Primary Coordinator and Consultants visited twenty or more classes viewing Sesame Street and held discussions with teachers of these classes and with teachers of classes which had watched Sesame Street earlier in the year but had subsequently discontinued.

Those few teachers whose classes still viewed Sesame Street on a regular basis at the end of the school year were convinced of the program's worth, especially in phonetics. Generally, these teachers had first year children or children with learning disabilities. Upon talking with these teachers, however, the consultants found that no preparation or follow-up work was planned.

The majority of teachers whose classes watched Sesame Street had abandoned viewing the program by Christmas, except in classes where children watched on a voluntary basis only.

Most teachers of beginners either do not have their classes scheduled for this program at all or they allow classes to watch for a few months only. The main reasons seem to be:

- most children have already been exposed to Sesame Street for one or two years before entering school.
- Sesame Street is aimed at the three- or four-year old; not the normal five- or six-year old (who tends to become bored).
- the program does not fit into the plans the teacher has for the class, either timewise or sequentially.
- the program, having been developed specifically for American Inner City children, does not satisfy the requirements of many Vancouver

H. Comments from Parents

A research intern interviewed the parents of twelve pupils (eight were high-frequency viewers, one from each class, and the other four were low-frequency viewers) to verify and to supplement their reactions as recorded on the questionnaire form. There was general agreement, particularly among the eight parents of high-frequency viewers, that the program was well-suited for pre-school children and that it did facilitate their learning. The comments of the parents are presented in Appendix G.

I. Conclusions

Sesame Street is an innovative television program exerting tremendous educational force at the pre-school level. This is not surprising when one considers the extensive research that accompanied its development. It was first released in the fall of 1969 and it quickly received wide acclaim. During the second season, the program was presented on approximately 300 television stations in America and the popularity of Sesame Street continued to increase. Educators were quick to recognize the potency of its influence and to consider ways of realizing its benefits.

The present study (made during the third year of telecasting) clearly indicates that Sesame Street is having considerable impact on kindergarten pupils in Vancouver. Almost every home has a television receiver, and approximately two-thirds of our four-year-olds and five-year-olds watch the program regularly. It is also being viewed to some extent in nearly one-half of the elementary schools of the city. Regular viewers of Sesame Street appear to have gained considerable advantage over other children in their knowledge and understanding of letters, words, numerals, quantities and shapes. To this extent, they are better prepared for school than the infrequent viewers among their classmates. Furthermore, their teachers claim that these children have derived other benefits, --more awareness of their surroundings, greater sensitivity and consideration for others, wider interests and abilities.

The findings of this study serve in a small way to support those of the E. T. S. evaluations that Sesame Street is effective in imparting basic facts and skills to children aged 3 to 5 years and that those who watch most learn most. Sesame Street clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of television as a medium for teaching pre-school children. In view of its impact on kindergarten pupils in Vancouver, it would seem advisable to consider not only how the educational benefits of this program may be maximized, but also how, in general, the tremendous potential of the television medium may be fully realized in our schools.

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APPENDIX A

THE GOALS OF "SESAME STREET" (Shortened Version)

goals listed below are adapted from a more detailed list developed by the Children's Television Workshop (One Lincoln Plaza, New York, New York 10023) for its 1970-71 version of Sesame Street.

1. Getting ready for reading.

   (a) Recognizing, matching up, and naming the letters in the alphabet. The program also tries to teach the sounds that correspond to each letter.

   (b) Matching identical words and identifying individual words in sentences.

   (c) Learning to read simple words and following along through sentences.

2. Using numbers.

   (a) Matching, recognizing, and giving the name of every number from one to twenty.

   (b) Reciting the names of numbers from 1 to 20, in their proper order.

   (c) Learning how numbers correspond to quantities of things, and how to use numbers in counting and picking quantities of objects.

   (d) The program will also provide opportunities for adding and subtracting.

3. Learning simple shapes like circles, squares, etc., and their proper names.

4. Identifying things in the world about us, by matching the same sorts of things, picking out similar things from groups, and putting things together from parts. Identifying like sounds, learning about rhyming words and rhythmic sound patterns.

5. Relating things and concepts.

   (a) Same/different
   (b) Big/bigger/biggest
   (c) None, some, all, more, and less
   (d) Under/over; first/last; beginning/end
   (e) Near/far; close to/away from.

6. Sorting and classifying objects as to their size, shape, function, color, quantity, etc., and being able to say which characteristics something has and which it doesn't have.

7. Reasoning and solving basic problems.

   (a) Discovering what happened before what is happening now.

   (b) Figuring out what should happen next.

   (c) Learning to judge what sorts of explanations make good sense and what do not.

8. Learning about oneself.

   (a) How the mind is useful for remembering, imagining, making plans, guessing from clues, etc.

   (b) Recognizing and naming all the parts of the body.

   (c) Understanding that there are many kinds of emotions.

9. Learning about the community of man.

   (a) The different members of the family; and what they do.

   (b) The roles and jobs of people in the community such as store clerks, dentists, mailmen, trash collectors, window washers, janitors, etc.

   (c) The nature and work of different establishments in the community, such as stores, parks, schools, airports, banks, etc.

10. Learning about different ways people act and react.

11. Learning about working together with others.

    (a) Getting difficult things done when everyone helps.

    (b) Having everyone do what they are best at, to get a hard job done.

    (c) Reaching agreement in conflicts or differences.

12. Learning about the man-made world, such as machines, tools, buildings, highways, and bridges.

13. Learning about things in nature, such as the sky, mountains, rivers, forests, plants, animals, and the processes of nature.

APPENDIX B

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
AND EVALUATION

BOARD OF SCHOOL TRUSTEES
OF SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 39 VANCOUVER

1595 WEST 10th AVENUE
VANCOUVER 9 B.C.
TELEPHONE 731-1131

January 20, 1972.

TO PRINCIPALS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Re: "Sesame Street" and "The Electric Company" T. V. Programs

We are presently attempting to determine the impact of these educational television programs on children in Vancouver. We would like to have, from all principals, a report on the patterns of viewing at various grade levels in school in respect to these programs. If your pupils are not viewing either of these programs please file a "nil" report. Please provide information on the form provided below and return it to the Department of Planning and Evaluation by February 4, 1972.

Thank you for your kind attention to this request.

E. N. Ellis.

E. N. ELLIS,
Assistant Head,
Data Services and Evaluation.

ENE:dn

"Sesame Street"	"The Electric Company"
Level or Grades	Level or Grades
Frequency of Viewing Per Week	Frequency of Viewing Per Week
No. of Children	No. of Children
Size of Viewing Group	Size of Viewing Group
Pre-Viewing Activities (if any)	Pre-Viewing Activities (if any)
Post-Viewing Activities (if any)	Post-Viewing Activities (if any)

Does your school have its own video-tape recorder? Yes _____ No _____

Date: _____ 1972. School _____ Principal _____

Please return to: Department of Planning and Evaluation,
Vancouver School Board,
1595 West 10th Avenue,
Vancouver 9, B. C.

by February 4, 1972.

APPENDIX C

_____ SCHOOL

January 20, 1972.

TO PARENTS OF KINDERGARTEN PUPILS

"Sesame Street", an educational T.V. program designed for pre-school children, has received wide acclaim throughout North America. We are interested in determining what impact this program is having on kindergarten children in Vancouver and to this end we ask that you be good enough to complete the following questionnaire.

Thank you for your cooperation.

_____
Principal

_____ _____
Child's Name School

Please circle the appropriate response

1. Has your child watched Sesame Street? Yes No

2. In general, what has been your child's pattern of watching Sesame Street?

School Year	Child's Age	Number of times per week					
1969-70	_____	0	1	2	3	4	5
1970-71	_____	0	1	2	3	4	5
1971-72	_____	0	1	2	3	4	5

3. Please indicate whether the child watched the program regularly on a color set or on a black-and-white set. Colour Black-and-white

4. How many letters of the alphabet does your child know? 0 1-5 6-15 16-25 26

5. How many numbers does your child know? 1-2 3-4 5-6 7-8 9 or more

6. Can your child read? Yes No

   If yes, please list some of the words and one of the books from which he has been reading.

7. How often per week did you watch the program with your child? 0 1 2 3 4 5

8. How often per week did you follow up the program through talk or other activity with your child? 0 1 2 3 4 5

9. Please feel free to make additional comments.

Please complete this questionnaire and return it to the school by February 9, 1972.

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
AND EVALUATION

BOARD OF SCHOOL TRUSTEES
OF SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 39 (VANCOUVER)

1595 WEST 10TH AVENUE
VANCOUVER 9, B.C.
TELEPHONE: 731-1131

February 24, 1972.

Dear Miss

The widespread acclaim and criticism of "Sesame Street" and "The Electric Company" T. V. programs have made it important for us to determine the impact on children in Vancouver. To this end, we are asking all principals to report on the viewing patterns in schools and we are asking parents of kindergarten pupils in eight schools (these have been selected at random, one from each of the eight areas) to respond to a questionnaire. It happens, entirely by chance, that your school was selected and I am writing to ask for your cooperation in our study.

We are attempting a follow-up similar to that done last year in Niles County, Illinois. A set of activities has been designed to study the effects of these programs on kindergarten pupils. You are being asked to report on the performance of ten children on eight tasks and on other apparent benefits to them.

The following materials are enclosed:

--a list of procedures for completing the follow-up,
--a page of letters and numerals,
--a statement of the goals of Sesame Street, and
--a record sheet.

Please have each pupil whose name is listed perform the tasks and report his success on the record form. Kindly return the completed record form to this office by March 15, 1972.

Thank you for your assistance in this project.

Very truly yours,

E. N. Ellis

E. N. ELLIS,
Assistant Head,
Data Services and Evaluation.

ENE:dn

PROCEDURES FOR COMPLETING SESAME STREET FOLLOW-UP

For Kindergarten Teachers:

To determine:

1. Whether child knows the names of the capital letters: show the child each of the letters, ask him to tell you the name of the letter. Record the number of letters the child knows.

2. Whether the child knows the names of the small letters: show the child each of the lower case letters, ask him to tell you the name of the letter. Record the number of letters the child knows.

3. Whether the child can give words that begin with specified letters: ask the child to give you a word that begins with each of the following letters: B, S, P, M, A. Record the number of letters to which the child can give at least one correct response.

4. Whether the child can print letters: ask child to print (not copy) the letters B, S, P, M, A. Record the number of correct responses.

5. Whether the child knows the names of the numerals: show the child each of the numerals 0-9 in random order (not consecutively), ask him to tell you the name. Record the number of correct responses.

6. Whether the child can associate quantity with numerals: ask the child to give you four crayons, seven crayons, nine crayons. Record the number of correct responses.

7. Whether the child knows the names of the shapes: show the child a picture of each of the shapes (square, circle, rectangle, triangle), record a check mark for those which the child knows.

8. Whether the child can give examples of the square and circle: ask the child to give you the names of objects in the classroom which are rectangles and other objects which are circles. Record a check mark for those children who can give at least two examples for both the rectangle and circle.

9. Whether the child has derived other benefits from the viewing of "Sesame Street". (See attached copy of program goals.) Discuss the programs informally with the child and determine what he likes best about the program. Are there indications that he has acquired a superior understanding of his physical and social environment? (Specify)

A B C D E F G H I

J K L M N O P Q R

S T U V W X Y Z

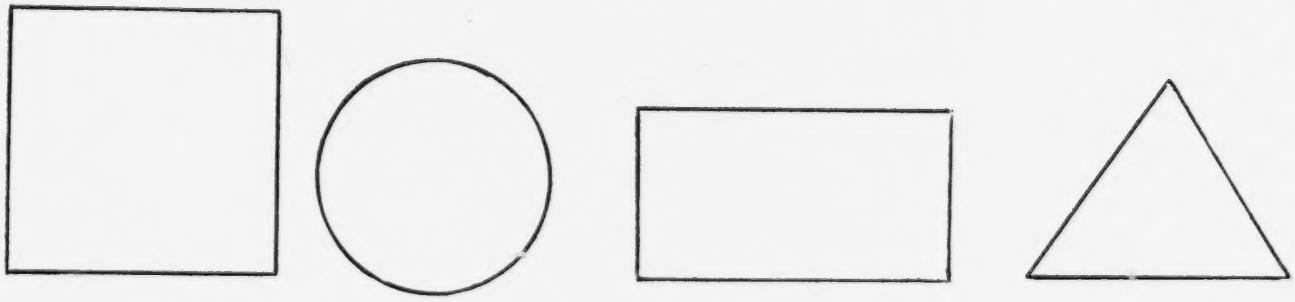
a b c d e f g h i

j k l m n o p q r

s t u v w x y z

B S P M A

1 4 5 2 0 7 6 3 9 8



SESAME STREET FOLLOW-UP
February, 1972.

	LETTERS				NUMERALS		SHAPES					ENVIRONMENT
	Record the number of correct responses											
NAME	Can name capitals	Can name small letters	Can give words beginning with specified sounds	Can print letters	Can print numerals	Can associate numerals with quantity	Can name: square	Can name: circle	Can name: rectangle	Can name: triangle	Can name objects that are round or rectangular	Specific Learnings about the Physical and Social Environment

APPENDIX E

COMMENTS FROM FIVE TEACHERS AND THEIR LISTED INDICATIONS THAT REGULAR VIEWERS OF SESAME STREET HAVE DERIVED OTHER BENEFITS

Teacher 1:

"All of the children tested (high-frequency viewers) come from homes which provide enriched backgrounds. Therefore, it is difficult to judge where the learning took place, e. g., Sesame Street, the home or school"

Teacher 2:

"Since many of the objectives of Sesame Street are also part of the regular kindergarten program it is not really possible to attribute specific learning situations to Sesame after six months of kindergarten have passed.

On questioning children about what they liked about the program - the favourite character was Oscar followed by Big Bird, Ernie and Gordon. What they enjoy and remember best seems to be the humour.

I think they have probably become more familiar with numbers and capital letters although I would question the validity of the scores on letters because they were listed in consecutive order."

Teacher 3:

What did you learn from Sesame Street?

- How to cross streets
- Care of garbage
- Who is in the neighbourhood
- What giraffes eat.
- "Facts of life"
- Being nice to people
- World is nice, some people are bad
- Animals - mean or friendly
- People wear different clothing
- Sizes of animals
- Sharing, feeding animals
- Big bird has to learn to do things himself
- Colours
- How to draw things
- Rhyming;
- Bears do tricks
- Monkeys sit on trees with one foot

"All mentioned numbers and alphabet."

Teacher 4:

"Knew about animals on farm, in the ocean, city, country--about sharing, teaching younger sister--not playing with matches. Aware of city, country, farms, zoo and farm animals--of families and sharing. Aware of forests, farms, rivers, oceans, city and country, about sharing and living together."

Teacher 5:

"These high-frequency viewers come from homes where the children are motivated and challenged and given many enriching experiences."

APPENDIX F

CONSULTANTS' COMMENTS ON SESAME STREET
(Transcribed from a tape recording)

When we visited the kindergartens, the teachers said that they thought the program was for three and four-year-olds. Initially the children in kindergarten showed a great interest in Sesame Street but by the end of the term this interest was waning except among pupils in Special Classes.

The immature children still like to watch and become a little upset if it doesn't come on. The counting from one to ten is repeated over and over again and the children become pretty tired of that. Not all the children that watch Sesame Street participate in it. When the time comes for counting they'll count or if there is any singing they'll try and sing along; but most of the children sat and watched. Sesame Street was a passive experience more than a participating one. In one school, pupils watched it for about twenty minutes, three times a week. It did help the program, the smaller children learning letters and numbers and it did help most children with their reading and blending.

In another school, the children turned the set on and those that wanted were allowed to watch and the others just went about their business and did whatever they chose to do.

Teachers commented that the children became restless when there were shots of scenery or of a bird or a flower. When the puppets came on, all of the children were attentive even those that weren't necessarily watching Sesame Street at the time.

In one class there was a set of puppets that someone had bought the children and they were working with those too. One complaint the teachers had was that the program didn't advance quickly enough; it stayed on the short vowels and that the children in later grade one and grade two get quite tired of it.

In the Electric Company the way they teach phonics is very poor. It is completely contrary to what we do and what we believe. Some children like the Friendly Giant. It's a slower paced program than Sesame Street but it holds the interest every bit as much. A grade one teacher whose children have learned to read with the i. t. a. found it extremely helpful for the children that had made the transfer. They caught on to the short vowels readily.

Most of the kindergarten teachers said that Sesame Street was a fact of life, and there was no way to control it. In most of the kindergartens that I visited, about three-quarters of the children watched Sesame Street at home, and consequently didn't bother with it too much in kindergarten. Most teachers wouldn't take from their activity time to watch Sesame Street, but they had their snack time and if the children wanted to watch it then it was all right.

Question: Was there any way a teacher is to know what program was coming on Sesame Street?

There is a brief guide in TV Guide, I think, and it tells you a little about the letters and numbers they are going to talk about.

Question: Were any of the kindergarten teachers using that to plan unit lessons?

No, but the grade one teachers were. The ones who did watch it in the first and second year were checked.

Question: Why would the grade one teachers do it and not the kindergarten?

The first grade works on the alphabet.

In the classes I saw,the teacher didn't make any attempt at all to preview or do any work previous or as a follow-up. It was just something the children wanted to watch, and one teacher felt that it was quite relaxing for the children just to sit and enjoy this.

One teacher thought that the familiarity and repetition was good for slow children because they felt comfortable with it, and although they didn't participate at first, they did after a while. She felt that it helped them memorize the rote learning. When I asked if the children really got the concept behind the rote learning and the alphabet, she said just the bright ones and they would get the concepts anyway.

At_____ school, the television was set up in the lunch room and the children went there by themselves. There wasn't a teacher with them at all. Some still come down, others have given it up by this point in the year. The ones that were there would sing, when it was a "sing-a-long" and join in this sort of thing. The teacher said that often they would follow up if they had a free choice activity when they went back.

A teacher of New Canadians said that that class really enjoyed the activity and language situation. He felt that some of the situations on Sesame Street were those you couldn't quite duplicate in the classroom. They particularly enjoyed some programs on industry and downtown activity. He thought that Sesame Street brought outside experiences into the classroom and he thought that the good points generally outweighed the poor ones. He also felt that Sesame Street had a learning situation far beyond the language and he used it as a take off point for activities more suitable for their age level. While his pupils didn't like it when he would repeat the alphabet and sounds over and over because they felt he was treating them like babies, they didn't mind the repetition on the TV screen. They really liked singing along and joining in. They apparently were trying to say the sounds and words without their accents and they were kind of judging each other. The teacher did say that jargon and poor English had been

used and that it was too bad they did this. There were little slang phrases that could have been left out but this teacher used these as teaching situations.

The repetition is something that a lot of teachers appreciate because when they have to repeat they can't get that much variation. One teacher complained that because it was geared for inner-city children in the states, it was unsuitable for our children.

The children weren't interested in just pictures of things, they wanted the puppets and more action. Some teachers felt that if Sesame Street was viewed on a colour set the children would watch. Some said that an hour was too long, that 30 minutes (like the Electric Company) was much better.

Question: In Britain, apparently they wouldn't show Sesame Street because of its being in conflict with the philosophy of British infant schools. I wonder how you would reconcile our use of it when we are going in the same direction.

Answer: I have seen it used in two schools where it was just a television spot in the corner and just the children who want, go and watch it--it is part of whatever activities they were doing. I can't really see a great contradiction--I can when a whole class group views Sesame Street. In that case it would be much like a work card and workbook. It is much better if the child can become involved in something he has initiated himself. Some schools had the cablevision in the open area and you couldn't go there and watch it because it would be too noisy, and so they were definitely wanting to watch the Electric Company.

Teachers should be more aware of the criticisms and reports that have been made of Sesame Street. Maybe they are aware of the commendations of Sesame Street because it has been pushed in the "States", but they aren't really aware of the criticisms.

APPENDIX G

COMMENTS FROM PARENTS

A. High-Frequency Watchers

1. "The program is well suited for pre-school children. It holds interest unlike most other programs for children of that age. The actors, the characterizations, the way music is used, and the repetitions are all very effective. For my son, the program was particularly useful because he has trouble seeing things as well as most children. I am convinced that he learned the alphabet because of Sesame Street, --probably because it was a song."

2. "I am quite sure the program is good for the children." This parent was convinced of its value because her older daughter didn't know nearly as much about the alphabet and numbers at that age; and even the two-year-old child knows some now.

3. This mother feels the program definitely "helps kids learn", because an older child didn't know nearly as much about the alphabet and numbers at that age.

4. Her son's viewing habits have changed recently because (a) he is too old for the program now and (b) the weather is nice. He now watches the Electric Company with great interest. She feels there is a definite connection between Sesame Street and her son's learning the letters and numbers. Even the 2-year-old child in the family now knows some letters and the melodies. Her son is currently bored in kindergarten because he already knows much of the material.

5. Felt that there was a definite connection between the program and learning the letters of the alphabet. Children like the program.

6. "Kids are tired of show now; only want to watch it about twice per week. Three reasons: (a) they don't like some of the new parts that are very fast-paced; (b) there are too many repeats now; (c) the weather is better. During the winter, the program definitely had an effect on my son's learning. One small proof of this is that he now uses the Sesame Street way of writing letters rather than the kindergarten's. The children like the singing parts."

7. Her daughter is not watching so much now; wants to play games instead. Kindergarten experiences take up her time now. Used to learn letters and numbers quickly while reciting them with the program, and enjoyed it very much.

8. Daughter now watches the Electric Company avidly. Vocabulary has doubled in the last several months, and is now too mature for Sesame Street. (Younger son is still captivated by Sesame Street.) Sesame Street had a definite effect on daughter's learning. For example, just a few moments ago, she had 5 cookies--4 white and 1 chocolate--and started singing "One of these is not like the others." She often shows this type of influence. Another example of the high regard in which the program is held by the father: at the church where he is pastor, they are using Sesame Street as an attraction in a program for elementary school children who don't have either parent at home after school and are getting into trouble with glue-sniffing.

9. Mother does not watch the program because she doesn't have cable TV.

10. Her son started watching it regularly after the questionnaire came home from school. Now not watching it very much because of the good weather.

11. Reasons for not watching the program were (a) lack of cablevision at the time when it was only available on cable, and (b) attendance at a pre-school during the time the program is aired this year. Has a high opinion of the program from seeing what some other children can do.

12. "My son doesn't watch the program because he plays outside all of the time."